DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 653 SP 028 238

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TITLE Staff Development in Varied U.S. Geographical Regions: A Study of Attitudes and Practices.
PUB DATE 23 Nov 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (11th, Nashville, TN, November 21-25, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Local Norms; *Program Attitudes; Program Effectiveness; *Staff Development; State Surveys; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A national study was conducted to determine both the perceived importance and the current practices of ongoing staff development programs in different regions in the United States. Responses to questionnaires were received from 267 school districts. A total of 51 school districts from the South, 49 from the Midwest, 44 from the East, and 39 from the West comprised the sample. The study focused on the following questions: (1) What differences existed between states in the four geographical regions of the United States in both the importance and utilization of staff development concepts and practices? (2) What effect did funding allocated to staff developent programs have upon such practices? (3) What differences existed between rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the perceived importance and utilization of staff development concepts and practices? and (4) What differences existed between the size of district (based upon student enrollment) in the importance and utilization of staff development concepts? Responses from each geographical region are discussed and analyzed. (JD)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN VARIED U.S. GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS: A STUDY OF ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

A Paper Presented at the

National Council of States on Inservice Education

Annual Meeting

November 23, 1986

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN VARIED U.S. GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS: A STUDY OF ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

Educational improvement has become a national priority. The quality of educational programs in operation within local school districts varies greatly across the nation. One of the many responsibilities educators must meet is to provide the necessary resources and means for staff improvement and leadership renewal. This may be done in a myriad of ways. The development and utilization of effective staff development programs is one of the most promising and adaptable means to impact teaching and administrative skills and, subsequently, to improve student achievement.

Perusal of the literature confirms that an effective staff development program is composed of a number of component parts. These include: a comprehensive needs assessment, staff input into planning, participation of personnel in conducting activities, delivery systems compatible with adult learning theories, support and reinforcement of teachers following staff development activities, and evaluation of program and teacher developed competencies following implementation.

With this in mind, a national study was conducted to determine both the perceived importance and the current practices of ongoing staff development programs. This study

was designed to serve as a descriptive analysis of selected staff development programs in the United States.

Participating school districts (See Table 1) were identified in two categories. Two-thirds of the school districts surveyed were identified as having outstanding staff development programs by the Chief School Officer from Departments of Education in each of the fifty states. One-third of the districts were randomly selected from the fifty states. Questionnaires were mailed in late 1985 to 353 school districts; responses were received from 267 districts for a 76 percent response rate. The response rate from state department identified districts was 81 percent; from randomly selected districts a 65 percent response rate was received.

The study focused on the following objectives:

1. What differences existed between states in the four geographical regions of the United States in both the importance and utilization of staff development concepts and practices?

2. What effect did funding allocated to staff development programs have upon such practices?

3. What differences existed between rural, suburban and urban school districts in the perceived importance and utilization of staff development concepts and practices?

4. What differences existed between the size of district (based upon student enrollment) in the importance and utilization of staff development concepts?

Attention was also given to differences between districts identified by the fifty State Departments of Education as having outstanding staff development programs and randomly selected districts.

General Observations

Staff development was viewed as being very important in the districts surveyed. Almost 94 percent of the respondents ranked staff development as important when compared to other educational activities in their district. The responding districts generally had put considerable time and effort into staff development and in many cases had received recognition for effectiveness by both their respective state education agency and/or other local school districts.

According to the perceptions of the respondents, 83 percent of all teachers viewed staff development a positive step to increase student achievement; over 79 percent of the superintendents agreed that staff development activities developed competencies ultimately intended to improve student achievement. Respondents generally agreed that staff development had improved teacher instructional skills. However, it must also be reported that over one-fifth of the respondents reported that teachers in their districts viewed staff development as a burden. Rural districts reported the

highest degree of dissatisfaction with 26 percent of teachers characterizing staff development as a burden.

What is the biggest problem in providing meaningful staff development? Respondents cited time periods to schedule staff development (45.3%), adequate financial support to facilitated activities (19.3%), and changing teacher and administrative attitudes toward staff development (17.7%) as the major obstacles in providing meaningful staff development.

University coursework, often considered a form of staff development by local school districts, was perceived as very important by one-third of the respondents. Yet almost half of the respondents reported that university coursework was still utilized to meet staff development needs. However, the utilization of university classes as staff development was described as declining in favor of district sponsored activities. Over 84 percent of the respondents believed that staff development for new staff was essential and should be required. Such data can hardly be interpreted as a vote of confidence for young teachers emerging from college and university classrooms.

Three-fourths of the responding districts had identified one or more individuals a staff development

coordinators. This was not surprising considering the pupil size found within the districts surveyed.

Staff Development Importance

The most important aspect in delivering staff development was providing teachers administrative support following staff development activities. Nearly 82 percent (See Figure 2) of the respondents representing the four regions of the United States cited administrative support following staff development as the most important factor. Teacher involvement in planning staff development activities was the second most important aspect with 77.4 percent citing this as very important. Over 76 percent of the respondents reported that modifying staff development programs based upon feedback was very important. Conducting a needs assessment (64.7 percent) and providing teachers with materials, guidelines and suggestions following staff development (64.2 percent) were also considered as important by the responding superintendents.

Regional Differences

Staff development practices varied greatly between the four geographical regions of the United States. Staff development practices were most established in the South. Superintendents representing the South were more likely to view staff development as a positive step to increase

student achievement; a higher number of respondents from southern states also indicated that staff development had improved teacher instructional skills. Interestingly, according to superintendents, a higher percentage of teachers in the South perceived staff development was a burden.

Districts in the South were more likely to conduct needs assessment and more likely to provide teachers administrative support and guidelines following staff development activities. Respondents indicated that districts in the South were also more likely to feature workshops or hands-on-activities. Evaluation of teachers implementing staff development activities was more likely to take place in the South with over 30 percent of the respondents indicating that teachers were evaluated on the implementation of staff development concepts. Teacher involvement in the planning of staff development activities was high in all four regions of the country. Districts in the Midwest were most likely to have staff development resource centers, and districts representing the West were most likely to provide teachers utilizing staff development concepts with incentives and/or recognition.

The Effects Of Funding On Staff Development Practices

Financial support surprisingly did not have a great impact on staff development activities. Financial support ranged from $0 to over $50.00 per pupil in one district. Districts spending the most money had greater teacher involvement in planning staff development, and were more likely to feature written programs with goals and desired outcomes. These districts were more likely to solicit teacher input into staff development activities. Districts spending the most money were also more likely to supervise teachers in the use of staff development concepts.

Interestingly, districts spending the least amount of money were more likely to conduct a needs assessment, and require staff development for new and experienced staff members. Surprisingly, these districts were also more likely to conduct staff development sessions after regular school hours.

Staff Development Differences In Urban, Rural And Suburban Districts

A number of differences existed between rural, suburban and urban districts. Rural districts were more likely to provide teachers with administrative support following staff development activities and more prone to make modifications following staff development. Rural districts were also more likely to conduct a needs

assessment, schedule follow-up sessions to discuss implementation, and insist upon participation of all staff. Staff development topics were also more likely to be derived from teacher evaluations in rural districts.

Urban districts were most likely to have a staff development resource centers. Suburban districts were most likely to feature teacher involvement in planning staff development, utilize local personnel to conduct staff development, and to provide teachers with material support following staff development. Suburban districts were more prone to provide workshop oriented activities and provide rewards and incentives for teachers utilizing staff development concepts.

District Size And Staff Development Practices

District enrollment also had an effect on staff development practices. Districts with enrollments above 25,000 were more likely to have written goals and desired outcomes, implement programs that attempted to meet student needs, have a staff development resource center, and consider university coursework as staff development.

In contrast, districts with enrollments below 2,500 were more likely to conduct needs assessments and derive staff development topics from teacher evaluations. These

smaller districts were also more likely to evaluate teachers on the use of staff development concepts.

State Recommended-Random Districts

In 1985 the Advisory Panel of the National Center of Learning (NCIL) identified and awarded 17 school districts for exemplary staff development programs. In addition, state departments of education representing each of the 50 states were asked to recommend districts doing an outstanding job in the area of staff development. Staff development concepts practiced by State Department-NCIL districts were compared with practices in random districts. State Department-NCIL districts were more likely to:

Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment.
Provide a program with written goals and objectives.
Emphasize workshop oriented activities.
Provide administrative support following staff development.
Supervise teachers following staff development.
Provide adequate financial support.

Summary

There is a wide range in the type and breadth of staff development programs, state control, and financial support provided to local school districts throughout the country. Examination of the data revealed that inconsistencies existed between the perceived importance and actual practices. Practices varied among districts according to enrollment and geographic location. The amount of money

allocated also had a effect on district practices although not as great an impact as might have been believed.

The importance of a good staff development program can not be overstated. Educational improvement will be influenced by the upgrading of teacher and administrative skills. However, in order for this to occur, local school districts will have to pay close attention to components comprising effective staff development. Once this is achieved, staff development will play a significant role in the struggle to improve teacher skills and bring about educational improvement.

TABLE 1- DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: TYPE, STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES OF DISTRICTS SURVEYED

TYPE OF DISTRICT SURVEYED		NUMBER OF PUPILS IN DISTRICT		MONEY ALLOCATED PER PUPIL FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT	
Urban	35.0%	Limited Enrollment-2500	14.1%	Less than $1.50	23.1%
Suburban	37.0%	2500-5000	19.2%	$1.51-$3.00	14.9%
Rural	18.5%	5001-15,000	32.2%	$3.01-5.00	15.3%
Other- Combination of Above Types	9.5%	15,001-25,000	11.0%	$5.01-$8.00	14.1%
		25,001-Above	23.5%	More than $8.01 and above	32.6%

Participants represented two categories; the first category was comprised of 167 districts recommended by state departments of education and 17 districts identified by the National Center for the Improvement of Learning (NCIL). The second group consisted of 72 districts randomly selected to participate in the study. Responses were received from 76% or 267 districts. Data was computer analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X) Program.

TABLE 2- PERCENTAGE SCORES OF THE IMPORTANCE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICES USUALLY FOLLOWED IN THE FOUR MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES.

	SURVEY QUESTION	IMPORTANCE	SOUTH	MIDWEST	EAST	WEST
1.	Teachers are provided with administrative support following staff dev.	81.6	82.1	63.5	66.7	62.5
2.	Staff development has improved teacher instructional skills.	80.4	83.9	65.4	50.0	72.5
3.	Staff development competencies improve student achievement.	78.4	92.9	71.2	61.9	94.9
4.	Teachers are involved in planning staff development.	77.4	83.6	82.7	78.6	87.2
5.	Modifications made to staff development programs based upon feedback.	76.6	73.2	78.4	66.7	85.0
6.	Staff development is required for all new staff.	67.4	87.5	51.9	50.0	42.5
7.	Local personnel conduct staff development sessions when qualified.	66.3	76.8	67.3	71.4	74.4
8.	A needs assessment is conducted prior to staff development.	64.7	82.1	65.4	61.9	76.9
9.	Teachers are provided guidelines and/or suggestions following sessions.	64.2	78.6	67.3	63.4	76.9
10.	Written programs with desired outcomes exist.	63.5	80.4	63.5	59.5	59.0
11.	Follow-up sessions to discuss implementation-utilization of concepts.	60.3	44.6	31.4	33.3	20.0
12.	Modification of teacher behavior essential part of staff development.	57.5	51.8	30.6	21.4	36.8
13.	Staff development is designed to meet individual teacher needs.	56.1	71.4	52.9	35.7	57.9
14.	Teachers are supervised in use of staff development concepts.	55.1	42.6	19.2	22.0	35.9
15.	Staff development topics often originate from teacher evaluation.	51.9	66.1	23.1	35.7	43.6
16.	Staff development sessions involve hands on experiences.	51.6	69.1	48.1	50.0	64.1
17.	Teachers have input in staff development.	50.5	58.9	50.0	45.2	55.0
18.	Activities are evaluated based upon changed teacher behavior.	46.0	30.4	17.6	28.6	33.3
19.	Staff development sessions are held after regular school hours.	43.5	70.9	54.9	57.1	59.0
20.	Incentives provided to teachers utilizing staff development concepts.	40.4	25.5	28.8	21.4	43.2
21.	University courses are considered as staff development.	37.8	62.5	49.0	35.7	60.0
22.	There is a staff development resource center in the district.	34.8	40.8	43.1	23.8	36.1
23.	Participation in staff development is mandatory.	30.5	58.2	26.9	54.8	13.2
24.	Teachers are evaluated on implementation of staff development concepts.	26.2	30.4	3.8	16.7	18.9
25.	Staff development is emphasized more at the secondary level.	7.9	3.6	2.0	2.4	2.7

The Importance category is a composite of 256 school districts representing the four geographical regions of the United States. A total of 51 school districts from the South, 49 from the Midwest, 44 from the East and 39 from the West comprised the sample.